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ABSTRACT

Part of a larger rhetorical biography, this essay examines several of the narratives of the southern writer and humorist, Irvin S. Cobb (1876-1944), to understand the unhappy "ordinary experience" of Southern racism and sexism. Following a biographical introduction, the first section discusses Cobb's narratives, while the second deals with Cobb's narrative Blacks. The third section discusses Cobb's narrative women. In the fourth section, Walter Fisher's concept of "narrative rationality" is applied in a critical analysis of Cobb's works. Sixty-nine notes are included. (SR)

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RACE, SEX, SECTION: REFLECTION OR DISTORTION?

Researchers in a variety of disciplines have concluded in recent years that the telling of stories may be a rhetorical act, regardless of whether the storyteller writes novels, short stories, scripts, fables, myths, or other narrations. In "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm..." Walter Fisher compiles their efforts to illustrate and exemplify work being done in literary criticism, philosophy, and religious studies as well as in communication research. In a chain of examples he shows that (1) literature refers to the world; (2) literary works "argue"; (3) "man is ... essentially a story-telling animal"; and (4) narration is not merely a mode of communication, but a paradigm of communication. Fisher defines a paradigm as "a representation designed to formalize the structure of a component of experience and to direct understanding and inquiry into the nature and functions of that experience." His "narrative paradigm" becomes "a dialectical synthesis of two traditional strands in the history of rhetoric: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme."[1]

The narrative perspective includes historical and situational factors in any consideration of the rhetorical value of "stories competing with other stories." Narratives are considered "rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity," and they are "inevitably moral inducements." The narrative perspective denies that "rhetorical" communication

must be constructed only as formal argumentation that may be judged only according to the rules of logic. Fisher encompasses alternate forms of rhetoric in his conclusion that "the narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; it reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication."[2] If we wish to understand "ordinary experience," Fisher says, the "ground for determining meaning, validity, reason, rationality, and truth must be a narrative context: history, culture, biography, and character."[3]

The rationality of a particular story arises from human beings' "inherent awareness of 'narrative probability,' what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing 'narrative fidelity,' whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives."[4] The ability to determine narrative rationality then comes not from learning to judge by a set of normative standards, but from socialization, from life experience, which all people possess. Therefore, "all persons have the capacity to be rational in the narrative paradigm."[5]

In order to determine the relative quality of stories Fisher provides two factors, narrative probability and narrative fidelity. He further proposes the "logic of good reasons" as "the most viable scheme" to test narratives. He finds that although "the most compelling, persuasive stories are mythic," the "most helpful and uplifting stories are moral." He cites John Gardner for clarification that "moral action is action that affirms life." A "bad story" such as Mein Kampf may be coherent but it "denies

the identity of significant persons and demeans others," it "lacks fidelity to the truths humanity shares in regard to reason, justice, veracity, and peaceful ways to resolve socio-political differences." In contrast, the "good stories" of Buddha or Christ, for example, "elevate [humanity] to the profoundest moral and metaphysical level the world has known."[6]

Although these extreme examples clearly differentitate "good" from "bad" stories, the vast majority of stories are not so clear. Like a single human being, a single artifact of human communication is likely to be both complex and contradictory. This essay, part of a larger rhetorical biography, examines several of the narratives of Irvin S. Cobb for the purpose of understanding the unhappy "ordinary experience" of Southern racism and sexism.

Cobb's Narratives

Cobb (1876-1944) had access to more of the media of mass culture in America than perhaps any other man of his day. He wrote novels, short stories, speeches, essays, screenplays, Broadway plays, and human interest "news" for New York newspapers. He was judged first in "contemporary letters" by a group of his peers in 1923. Cobb was born and reared in ultra-Confederate Paducah, Kentucky, and he embodied the mind of the post-Civil War South as it struggled with questions of racial segregation, "old South" cultural values, and economic and political upheaval. Judge Priest, his major fictional middle-class hero, and Jeff Poindexter, his most enlightened black

voice, typified the old and the new South, while both struggled to live "by the rules" in a period when the rules were changing. In his preface to Back Home, Cobb's first volume of short stories, he expressed his goal of explaining the Southerner to the world, and ridding his people of the burden of the stereotyped images of either the plantation aristocracy or the poor whites. He hoped to illustrate the life of the gentry class between these two extremes, middle-class people who lived on farms or in small towns.[7]

Cobb's middle class whites attained their positions in the community through a combination of factors that included strength of character, hard work, ancestry, and a connection with the Civil War. Cobb believed in the "up-by-the-bootstraps" ideal of success in America and in the South. He "knew," however, that one had to combine virtue with hard work in order to be both happy and successful "in the end." It was one thing to make money, but it was quite another to have self respect, money, and the honest admiration of one's fellows. When his characters forgot their humble beginnings, or attempted to tamper with those beginnings, when they chose not to pay their debts to their benefactors, and when they began to divide people into "best families" and "commoners," they were sure to be headed for that fall that is preceded by pride.

Neither work nor ancestry alone equalled virtue. The self-made man had to walk a fine line to meet with Cobb's approval. Actually, such a man was like a rat-terrier--he could

"smell out opportunities, but otherwise he was just an ordinary dog."[8] When the ordinary dog turned into a "little tin god on wheels," with the crowd trailing along greasing the wheels "with words of praise and admiring looks," a crash would soon follow.[9] The same fate awaited the man who relied on his "old family name," and followed the "profession of being a grandson."[10]

Real southerners, Cobb said, had a "love for their own states and an honest veneration for the records made by men of southern birth and southern blood in the Civil War."[11] He aimed not only at explaining the South to the North, but at perpetuating this veneration in the minds of his southern readers. Legends of the "great lost cause" of states' rights permeated Cobb's childhood years. His father fought in the war and his uncle, Robert Cobb, commanded Cobb's Battery, a mobile artillery force under General John C. Breckinridge of the Kentucky Orphan Brigade.[12] Breckinridge christened the Confederate First Kentucky Brigade the "Orphans" at the Battle of Stones River because their home state chose to remain in the Union, and once they left home, they were unable to return until the war ended.[13] Although 4000 "orphans" marched to war, only 600 returned.[14]

Cobb used this heroic saga as a tool of persuasion for his most important "voice," Judge Priest. While pretending to be naive and uneducated, the Judge always outwitted his opponents, whether they were actually malicious or simply misguided, often through the emotion-laden appeal of the ghost of the Orphan Brigade. In the first Judge Priest story, "Words and Music,"

a young man from Paducah goes south to Tennessee to go into business, but ends up shooting his partner--a scoundrel, of course. Although the boy makes the grave error of hiring a Yankee lawyer from Indiana, he has the good sense to call on Judge Priest and two others from "back home" to appear as character witnesses.[15]

As fate would have it, the boy's father and the Judge had helped liberate this very Tennessee town from the Union Army in the "summer of '64." Just as that reminiscence is revealed in the court room, music is heard outside in the street. According to Cobb, "It was only a twenty-cent mouth organ, three sleigh bells, and a pair of the rib bones of a beef-cow being played all at once by a saddle-colored negro man but it sounded for all the world like a fife-and-drum corps: If you want to have a good time,...If you want to ketch the devil;...Jine the cavalree!" To the older ones in the court room the years were "rolled back" by the "marching song of the Southern trooper--Forrest's men, and Morgan's, and Jeb Stuart's and Joe Wheeler's."[16]

Cobb made it seem as though he wrote stories only for amusement. Present day readers of Cobb in Paducah believe he was "above" persuasion, that he wrote for pure entertainment.[17] An early biographer said there were no "little essays" or "philosophizing scattered through" the stories.[18] Regardless of their readability, Cobb's stories were devised for rhetorical purposes, one of which helped prolong a positive attitude for an era of mixed victory and defeat. He certainly did not

singlehandedly perpetuate a separate consciousness that tied southerners to the Civil War fifty years after the cannons ceased firing. Other contributors include the persistent southern oral tradition and family ties to groups organized specifically to glorify the cause, such as the Daughters of the Confederacy. Cobb may be viewed, however, as an exemplar who had a particularly prodigious output. As Fisher puts it, "There is no story that is not embedded in other stories."[19]

Cobb's Narrative Blacks

Cobb was obsessed with race. His speeches, his jests, toasts, and quips nearly all made reference to blacks in some way. Black characters appeared in short stories set in the South and in New York City. In the preface to Back Home, Cobb provided a clue to his behavior. Most southerners, he said, were no different from anyone else, except for "two main contributing causes," the "everpresent race question," and the "still living and vivid memories of the great war."[20] In order to keep southerners different, he kept both issues alive. He embroidered the blacks closest to him, Mandy and Uncle Rufus, who lived in his childhood home, into the lives of other Paducah residents to create "Aunt Dilsey" and "Jeff Poindexter," Judge Priest's servants. Cobb observed black American soldiers in France and wrote of their exploits. He described blacks' characteristics with the assurance of a southerner who possessed a special "understanding" that no northerner could ever hope to attain.

He explained his concept of the working habits of blacks, for example, in the story, "Forrest's Last Charge." They would

not work for northerners since the foolish Yankees tried either to fraternize with them or to drive them with hard words. The middle ground, that only a "southern-born overseer" could find, solved the problem. He would have "harried the crews with loud profanity, with dire threats of mutilation and violent death, and they would have grinned back at him cheerfully and kept right on at their digging and shovelling."[21]

Northerners failed to understand, he thought, the familial relationship between old former slaves and young descendants of slave owners. In "Quality Folks," Aunt Charlotte, an old black woman, lived with and worked for the "Dabney girls," two young women whose parents had died. The fiance of the eldest daughter wanted to replace Aunt Charlotte with several servants, but she refused either to tolerate them or to leave the premises to live in a little house left to her in Mr. Dabney's will. The impasse was settled by Judge Priest who revealed that in the hard times that befell the family after the deaths of the parents Aunt Charlotte had sold her house to earn money for the girls to attend boarding school. The story ended with professions of undying love and devotion on both sides, which left the fiance as perplexed as ever.[22] The radio series, "Family Theater," featured "Quality Folks" to exemplify its "American home" and "family fireside" themes.[23]

Cobb loudly criticized the Ku Klux Klan, and called it one of the "serpent's vilest eggs."[24] The serpent, however, was religious bigotry, not racial prejudice. Cobb also saw the Klan as an organization formed to "bring order out of chaos,"

but one that had succeeded only in "making the chaos more chaotic."[25] Cobb thought of the Klan as an ideological threat because it tried to "ram [its] views down other peoples' throats,"[26] but he never seemed to abhor the possibility that some of those throats might end up with ropes around them.

Cobb made a strong anti-lynching statement, however, in the story, "The Mob From Massac," but he did not mention the Klan or even hint at its involvement. In the story, a black man had committed an unnamed crime against a white woman. When the sheriff brought in a likely suspect, members of a lynch mob came to Judge Priest's jail to seek retribution in their own way. Jeff Poindexter, the only black man brave enough to be outdoors in the presence of the mob, ran to warn the Judge who was asleep in his court house office. The Judge put his life, his career, and his livelihood in jeopardy by standing in the dusty street and drawing a line with his umbrella over which none dared to step. Later, when the sheriff found the real criminal, those same mob members reelected the Judge because he had prevented them from committing an injustice.[27] The key issue here was not the rights of blacks in general--not even their right to live free of fear of the lynch mob. The issues were protection of the law and protection of Judge Priest's political career, which he jeopardized not for a poor cowering black man, but for the "majesty of the law."

Cobb believed in a natural inferiority of blacks and expressed this position clearly in Red Likker, a novel. Describing groups

of boys growing up in the Blue Grass, he said that a black child often set the pace, because up to a "certain age" he "excelled in the qualities of leadership." After that, however, he slowed up, "while the others kept on and passed him and went ahead."[28] Because of these "innate" differences, Cobb believed in separation of the races, or the "color line," as he preferred to call it. When asked in 1924 to list fictional characters he would invite to a week-end party, he included Uncle Remus, but said that "naturally we might not want him as a guest...but at least he could wait on the table." That he wanted him there at all was because of Uncle Remus' authenticity as a "real Negro" who was "so utterly different from the average popular conception today."[29]

Cobb's first expression of doubt about his preconceived notions on race came as a result of his observation of black soldiers in France. In two Saturday Evening Post articles, "Young Black Joe," and "Let's Go!" Cobb praised the bravery, the pride, and the enthusiasm of these troops. Cobb cited the French government's award of the Crois de Guerre with an additional gold palm leaf to a black soldier, "the first American soldier to be so honored," as proof that "the colour of a man's skin has nothing to do with the colour of his soul." He acknowledged the pain inflicted by name-calling, and assured readers that although a word that had been uttered billions of times in our country, sometimes in all kindliness," would still be used, it would take on a new meaning. He proclaimed that "hereafter N-I-G-G-E-R will merely be another way of spelling the word American."[30]

Cobb was unable to let his complimentary treatment stand alone. The officers commanding these troops were white southerners, which Cobb thought fortunate, since they could understand the soldiers' unwillingness to guard a cemetery at night, and could sympathize with their disappointment that "watermelons did not grow in Northern France."[31] A lone black man quietly sharpening his knife was "making war-medicine,"[32] and another wrote home, he said, expressing dismay that the French did not "bother with no colour-line business."[33] Cobb felt compelled to drag out the old stereotypes and throw them in the faces of those to whom he had given a measure of respect.

Cobb understood the power of words and claimed that he avoided calling "negro employees" by derogatory names because of discouragement of the practice in his youth. As a prudent man, he avoided such words since blacks had grown so "aggressively race conscious." As a sensitive human being, he avoided racial slurs, he said, because of "the premise that needlessly to hurt the feelings of a fellow creature isn't smart, isn't even decent."[34] The word "nigger," regardless of its intent, "never fell on black ears but it left behind a sting for the heart."[35] Yet throughout the Judge Priest stories, this was the Judge's word for Jeff Poindexter, and the word Cobb's black characters used against each other.

Must we conclude that Cobb suffered either from massive insincerity or chronic dissonance? How else could he condemn a particular behavior and then practice it himself? A Judge Priest/Jeff Poindexter story, "The Ravelin' Wolf," provides a

third possibility, that is, Cobb's over-riding need for continuity of the old southern lifestyle, which precluded racial dissension.

In the story, an "organizer" came to town after the war and took advantage of the "vague and formless" unrest that began with the "return of divers black veterans." The organizer, Dr. J. Talbott Duval, whose speech "dripped gorgious ear-filling Latin words," was a silver-tongued orator, educated in a "white man's college, somewhere in the North."[36] Jeff agreed to help the Judge get rid of him because Jeff's "best girl" showed a preference for Dr. Duval. Judge Priest paid for Jeff to visit all the places Duval had been before and "get the goods" on him. Jeff found an abandoned wife and a stolen church treasury; and, when confronted, Duval ran away.

In a conversation with Jeff, the Judge expressed the typical white point of view on agitation. He contended that although both races had cause for complaint against the other at times, they had gotten along well enough in the past, and could continue to do so if no one stirred up discontent. Jeff asked the Judge about the lack of a color line in Europe and when the Judge confirmed it, Jeff responded that the trouble with Europeans was that they had not been properly raised.[37] In this story the "organizer" had to be a scoundrel to satisfy Cobb's assertion that blacks had no reason to be rebellious. Open revolution by southern blacks would destroy the old ways. Even peaceful change represented too great a threat for this "son of the South" to allow.

Another Cobb story, "Black and White," illustrates the clash of values between the old and new South with the reader being placed on the side of the old by the disrespectful misconduct of young blacks against old Uncle Ike Copeland. Only Judge Priest and one other member show up for the regular monthly meeting of the Gideon K. Irons Camp, the local Civil War veterans group, which falls on the Eighth of August, the emancipation day celebrated by black Kentuckians. While they wait, old Uncle Ike trudges up the steps to the hall and announces that he assumes he is welcome there and that he feels more comfortable with these old white men than with the young blacks who have left him out of their celebration. Uncle Ike, like many southern blacks had gone to war with his young "Marster Willie" and served the cause of the Confederacy.[38] Cobb used this character to bridge a seeming gap in his rhetorical strategies by linking both blacks and whites to his ideal southerner.

The novel, Jeff Poindexter, Colored, contains Cobb's lengthiest treatment of the supposed black point of view, actually by today's standards a white racist argument hiding under a dialect. Liberal elements, showing Cobb's argument with himself, creep into the novel occasionally, but are given very little space, and no real development. The fact that Jeff acquires a new career, one not based on servitude, shows progress. Jeff's ability to see through those who have outwitted his young white employer is a retreat from the stance taken by Cobb on the inferiority of blacks. Jeff's insistence that he be considered a "person" and not a "problem" indicates some understanding, at

least. His suggestion to a white movie producer that every now and then he make a serious film showing "how the race is a-strivin' to git ahaid in the world," opens a small door to progress.

The premise of the novel, however, remains the typical "boss man"/servant relationship. When prohibition forces Judge Priest, a drinking man, to leave the country, he "loans" Jeff to Dallas Pulliam. They go off to New York together, with Jeff riding in the train's "Jim Crow section" till they cross the Ohio River. Pulliam falls prey to swindlers and when Jeff comes to the rescue, Pulliam rewards him by investing in Jeff's newly formed Harlem movie company.

Jeff shows readers all of Cobb's confusion on the race issue, in first arguing that he is not a "new-issue" black person who has no proper sense of gratitude or faithfulness, but that if anyone wanted to come across the color line in his direction he would welcome them. He assures Pulliam that when he meets one of his "own kind of white people," or when he goes back down "below the Line," he will know his "place" and his "station" and respect them both.[39] Jeff looks at society ladies putting permanent waves in their hair and contrasts them with blacks in the South taking "the kinks out," and calls the situation a "compliment to one race or the other," but which he cannot be sure.[40]

The personality Cobb invented for Jeff held all the same aspirations for "coming up in the world" as any of his most ambitious white characters. Jeff's opportunity came knocking by accident, but he recognized it and latched onto it. He was

neither assertive nor servile toward whites although he used deferential language and questioned the wisdom of those who did not. Cobb appreciated and fostered the "Uncle Tom" image in several characters, but he could not quite cast Jeff in that mold. A black "person" whose intelligence, strength of character, and unique traits could be separated from race was too radical a concept for Cobb to allow, but Jeff moved in that direction. Cobb found it necessary to make Jeff prejudiced, too, however his major target for abuse was not a white man, but a Japanese cook. Unfair as it may be to judge Cobb by present standards, it is unfortunate that he could not have risen above his times. He possessed persuasive gifts that could have been used in the cause of racial justice as they were used in other campaigns. The judgment applies equally to his views on women's rights.

Cobb's Narrative Women

Cobb claimed to favor women's suffrage and to deplore the cartoonist's image of an equal rights advocate, the "iron-jawed lady, ...the rambunctious female demon...half freak and half pest, wearing her hair and skirts short and her tongue and feet long." He insisted that he looked forward to the day when the electorate consisted of more "worthy and intelligent women" and less "unworthy and ignorant men."[41] His assertion that men in Kentucky had considered women their superiors for so long that they had trouble seeing them as equals,[42] however, only sounds like a progressive statement. When coupled with Cobb's presentation of women characters, it turns into the rallying cry of the southern gentleman, who demands the idealized southern

lady. She, of course, "would never descend so far as to sully her hands by dabbling in politics."[43]

Cobb consistently invented vacuous, pretentious, shallow stereotypes for his fictional women. Perhaps, as his granddaughter asserts, he actually knew nothing about women, and never adequately understood any woman well enough to write about one.[44] According to his grandson, Cobb, like Ernest Hemingway, had "places" for all his women, and though they fit perfectly into their places, none were really people.[45]

Cobb seemingly feared no rivalry from women in his profession because, as he pointed out, they had no gift for humor and no talent for "subjective analysis." While a woman might have "a witty tongue" or a "stinging pen," no woman could laugh at herself. Dorothy Parker's "sallies" he called "brilliant and pungent and searchingly wise," but when she turned "introspective," self-pity welled up in her "small dainty body like an artesian gusher." This defect was not due to "oversensitiveness" or to "abstract vanity," but simply to "being a woman." The only exceptions he could name were Sophie Kerr and Gracie Allen.[46] Most humorous women, he said, carried "chilled-steel barbs in their wit."[47]

During World War I, Cobb ridiculed the behavior of wealthy women who paid their own passage to Europe, dressed in pseudo-uniforms and went about "feeding the starving fliers" or adding culture or refinement to the bloody business of waging a war. He singled out one in particular who, though she could not drive and had no car, had come to France to "drive a car at

the Front--an ambulance or a motor truck or a general's automobile."[48] One group of well-bred and well-educated young ladies wished to aid peasant refugees by giving "lessons in domestic science."[49]

Cobb depicted Confederate women with their self-important pretensions and their pseudo-military uniforms in the story, "When the Fighting was Good." A railroad car decorated by the ladies with red and white bunting and small Confederate battle flags was the setting, and the annual reunion trip made by the local veterans was the occasion. Although one of the men protested that, "At a reunion of the veterans, somehow I do love to see a veteran interspersed here and there in among the fair sex," the passengers included a number of females attired either in the same red and white of Confederate bunting, or in gray wool with brass buttons complete to the "snug military throat latches," wide black belt and cavalry buckle.[50] Such costumes undoubtedly caused their wearers much discomfort in the humidity of the southern summer, but as Cobb concluded, "No woman who fancies herself becommingly dressed ever does seem to suffer by the rigors of climate. It is a triumph of self-content over fleshly misery."[51] In the 1934 Will Rogers film, "Judge Priest," all these characters and events were celebrated again for the mass American movie audience, including a veterans' parade past a reviewing stand filled with well-corsetted Confederate ladies.[52]

Cobb felt a need to show his fictional women the error of their ways and to exploit their "known habits." Standard characteristics included dominance, arrogance, pretentiousness,

and stupidity. When a modern Junior League daughter insisted on marrying a "gorgeous" but unsuitable cowboy, her wise father easily won out through subterfuge.[53] Of course, women talked constantly, but said nothing; while men conversed on politics or war, women talked about hair styles.[54] An occasional temptress dared show her face, but Cobb soundly slapped it.[55] He suggested an aggrieved husband could rely on the "firm of Smith and Wesson" as a remedy for an unfaithful wife.[56]

Some of his women were social climbers who stepped all over their families and friends on the way up. Some were born aristocrats who did not know there were real people down below. In one story a pretentious girl who married "up" would have nothing to do with her poor parents. They lived in a "shabby little sealed-up coffin box down at the poorer end of Yazoo Street," while she lived in a "handsome new stucco house, as formal and slick as a wedding cake up at the aristocratic head of Chickasaw Drive."[57] When a street-car ran over her father, she staked her claim to an inheritance that would have kept her mother forever. Judge Priest, ever the Jeffersonian democrat, "moved in all circles without serious impairment to his social position in the community at large," and was thereby able to step in just at the proper moment, shame the girl, and save her poor mother from the poor house.[58]

In another story, a boy was brought up by his rich, widowed mother without the influence of any man, and "almost in the image of a girl." When he reached early young manhood, he rebelled,

and Judge Priest saw to it that he joined the navy, where World War I "made a man" of him. Earlier, Judge Priest had tried to intervene, but when he suggested the Boy Scouts, the boy's mother "just bristled out her feathers...like a hen with a lone chick when a tomcat comes prowlin' in the chicken yard." Since the scout leader had not "restricted his troop to the sons of our leadin' families," she said, she could not let her son mingle with "all sorts of boys on terms of social equality."[59] The boy, her pride and joy, had to get into trouble and be taken from her before she would repent.

Cobb may indeed have relied on stereotypes because he never took time to understand women. A second explanation lies in his need to keep a sense of stability in his life through writing about the past--a time when men were men and women, bless their hearts, were just women. Unlike his fictional men who achieved success through the virtues of boldness, honor, or wisdom, Cobb's women achieved success only through docility, faithfulness, or sacrifice. Women who competed in a man's world could never be the equal of men because, if nothing else, they had "dainty little bodies." Even seemingly "good" women generally had the shortcoming of pride.

Analysis

For my analysis of Cobb's works I further utilize the "perspective for critically reading texts" found in Fisher's "elaboration" on the narrative paradigm. Fisher clarifies how the paradigm may be "employed in an interpretation and assessment of a text in which there are claims to knowledge, truth, or reality."[60] This perspective, "narrative rationality," helps one know whether a

story is "trustworthy and reliable as a guide to belief and action."[61]

For his clarification Fisher uses a conversation in Plato's Gorgias between Socrates and Callicles on the nature of the "good life." Fisher shows that Socrates' life of philosophy that supports the values of "truth, the good, beauty, health, wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, harmony, order, communion, friendship, and a oneness with the Cosmos" corresponds with the "moralistic myth of the American Dream: 'tolerance, charity, compassion, and true regard for the dignity and worth of each and every individual.'"[62] Callicles' life of political hedonism that supports the values of "pleasure, expediency, self-aggrandizement, courage, strength, political acumen and success, and the will to power" corresponds with the "materialistic myth of the American Dream: 'effort, persistence, playing the game, initiative, self-reliance, achievement and success.'"[63] The age old problem of the ideal versus the real is posed for the audience by this conflict in value systems.

In judging a story for its "narrative rationality" the critic looks for signs of narrative probability, that is whether the storyteller presents a coherent narrative, free of contradictions; and for narrative fidelity, that is, whether the storyteller illustrates a "logic of good reasons."[64] Fidelity encompasses both sound reasoning as judged perhaps by logical standards, perhaps by its usefulness "as a 'warrant for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered.'" Fidelity also includes values judged for their worth by standards of "pertinence to the

story or case at hand; appraisal of their impact if adopted on one's concept of self, one's relationship with others, and the process of rhetorical transaction; ascertainment of their confirmation or disconfirmation in one's life, the lives of those whom one admires, and the best life that one can conceive; and evaluation of their effects on the quality of life generally." Narrative rationality made up of probability and fidelity thus constitutes "practical wisdom."[65]

Irvin Cobb's attitudes toward blacks, women, and the South, as revealed in this sampling of his narratives, are so intertwined and so confused as to be nearly as difficult to separate as triplets joined at birth. Personally, he looked upon women as inferior, but beloved creatures that he could never hope to understand. Cobb's women characters were generally either nagging old bullies, or pretentious middle-aged matrons, or sweet young things, insipid but pretty. Blacks, as inferior as women, could never be equal to whites of either sex because they were, after all, black. His black characters were often wiley old retainers who "borrowed" from their employers, or non-persons slinking about on the edges of life. The South he thought of as a Garden of Eden in America, worthy of secional pride because of its martyrdom in the great "War for the Southern Confederacy."

These stereotyped views were so deeply embedded in Cobb's personality that a lifetime of experience to the contrary failed to wipe them out. They were a version of "truth" he inherited from a long line of ancestors. He heard this truth daily from family members, playmates, teachers, and preachers throughout his childhood. In his stories and speeches, however,

one may see an occasional glimpse of doubt, a fleeting appeal to be convinced otherwise, a slight willingness to see the serpent in the garden or the human being under the black skin or behind the beguiling smile.

To look at Cobb's work through the frame of narrative probability, we find coherence from story to story, and among characters and types. The stories are formally and tightly constructed; Cobb often waged war against the "chaos" of modernism.[66] They are probable, however, only if the reader colludes in the perpetuation of his stereotypes. Unfortunately, many did then, as many do now, and as many will in a future that answers "yes" to questions like, "Isn't that just like a woman?"

In the area of narrative fidelity we begin to see the "badness" in these well-written, "good" stories. On the surface, and for the time they were written, Cobb's stories seem to be moral and uplifting. Judge Priest, in the examples shown, saved an innocent though misguided young man from the gallows, two innocent though misguided young women and consequently old Aunt Charlotte from too many servants, an innocent young black man who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time from the gallows, Uncle Remus from missing a dinner party, brave black soldiers who undoubtedly had been and would be called names, a community from racial strife caused by an "organizer," an old black man from mistreatment by young black men, a flighty young lady from a cowboy, a widow from the poor house, and a fatherless boy from his society conscious mother.

The flaws surface when we look for the values embedded in the stories and weigh their impact on the self concepts of the

characters and of the readers or listeners, the more important components of these rhetorical transactions. "Practical wisdom" that values only white men surely detracts from the "quality of life generally." We can create a structure parallel to Fisher's to conclude that Judge Priest's life of Civil War reverence that supports the values of faithfulness and conservatism corresponds with the segregationist myth of the South: remembrance, veneration, adherence to "known" ways, and sure knowledge of racial and gender differences. Our use of Cobb's narratives for study reveals the subtlety with which the "truth" of these differences have been disseminated in our society. For a long period Cobb was the highest paid short story writer in America and his stories helped "sell" the Saturday Evening Post year after year.[67]

Judged by Fisher's standards of "practical wisdom and humane action: Cobb's narratives fail to measure up. Judged by their usefulness in interpreting the social reality of racist and sexist attitudes they are highly useful. In his failure to act on an impulse to render Jeff Poindexter a complete human being Cobb conforms to Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea cited by Fisher that "there is no means of compelling someone to see the truth who does not want to see it."[68] Fisher points out the schizophrenia that results from trying to live in harmony with both the moralistic and materialistic myths of America.[69] Cobb lived and wrote in a milieu in which both of these myths were papered over with the segregationist myth of the South. Schizophrenia in his case may have been complicated by multiple personality syndrome.

Cobb seemed to want to reflect a mirror image of southern life for his readers, but the light shining on the reality was bent in the process. Cobb's portrayal reflected southern life to the extent that any fictional treatment of a large and varied geographic region can. His presentation distorted the image, though, in two ways. First, his own beliefs and conceptions were governed by his family's values. He granted too much power over the behavior of individuals to the mere fact of southern birth. He characterized the South as much more of a monolithic society than it was, or could have been. Second, he consciously distorted the picture. His scenes, always sharply focused, pretended to be authentic, but had two-by-fours supporting them from behind like the western town on a movie lot. In his portraits, heroes had halos, and villains had horns, and the choice of accouterments depended on a character's willingness to be "of the Old South."

NOTES

[1] Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," Communication Monographs 51 (Mar., 1984): 1-2.

[2] Fisher, 2.

[3] Fisher, 3.

[4] Fisher, 8.

[5] Fisher, 10.

[6] Fisher, 16.

[7] Irvin S. Cobb, Back Home (New York: George H. Doran, Co., 1911), p. vii.

[8] Irvin S. Cobb, "How To Choke a Cat Without Using Butter," Ladies and Gentlemen (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1924), p. 301.

[9] Irvin S. Cobb, "Killed With Kindness," Ladies and Gentlemen (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1924), p. 147.

[10] Irvin S. Cobb, "According to the Code," Old Judge Priest (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1914), pp. 263-4.

[11] Cobb, Back Home, p. viii.

[12] William C. Davis, The Orphan Brigade (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), p. 160.

[13] Davis, Orphan Brigade, pp. 135-6.

[14] Davis, Orphan Brigade, p. 270.

[15] Irvin S. Cobb, "Words and Music," Back Home (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), p. 25.

[16] Cobb, "Words and Music," pp. 31-2.

[17] Mrs. Raymond Roof, Telephone Interview, Feb. 15, 1983, Paducah, Kentucky.

[18] Fred G. Neuman, Irvin S. Cobb, His Life and Achievements (Paducah, Ky.: Young Publishing Co., 1934), p. 107.

[19] Walter R. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," Communication Monographs 52 (Dec., 1985): 358.

[20] Cobb, Back Home, p. ix.

[21] Irvin S. Cobb, "Forrest's Last Charge," Old Judge Priest (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1914), pp. 289-91.

[22] Irvin S. Cobb, "Quality Folks," From Place to Place (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1920), pp. 206-10.

[23] Radio broadcast of "Family Theater," tape recording in Louisville Public Library.

[24] Cobb, Exit Laughing, p. 544.

[25] Irvin S. Cobb, Red Likker (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1929), p. 57.

[26] "Dry Laws, Sex Plays, Puritans Roil Cobb," Louisville Herald-Post, March 21, 1926.

[27] Irvin S. Cobb, "The Mob From Massac," Back Home (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), pp. 272-80.

[28] Cobb, Red Likker, p. 77.

[29] "Cobb Compiles List," Courier-Journal, February 24, 1924.

[30] Irvin S. Cobb, "Young Black Joe," The Glory of the Coming (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), p. 295.

[31] Cobb, "Young Black Joe," pp. 289-90.

[32] Irvin S. Cobb, "Let's Go!" The Glory of the Coming (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), pp. 298-99.

[33] Cobb, "Let's Go!" p. 307.

[34] Cobb, Exit Laughing, p. 401.

[35] Cobb, "Young Black Joe," pp. 295-6.

[36] Irvin S. Cobb, "The Ravelin' Wolf," Sundry Accounts (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1922), pp. 218-20.

[37] Cobb, "Ravelin' Wolf," pp. 228-31.

[38] Irvin S. Cobb, "Black and White," Back Home (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), pp. 315-48.

[39] Irvin S. Cobb, J. Poindexter, Colored (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1922), p. 269.

[40] Cobb, J. Poindexter, p. 45.

[41] Irvin S. Cobb, "Looking Both Ways From Forty," American Magazine, 83, May, 1917, p. 119.

[42] Irvin S. Cobb, "Glory of the States: Kentucky," American Magazine, 81, May, 1916, pp. 19-20.

[43] Cobb, Red Likker, p. 103.

[44] Buff Cobb Martin, Personal Interview, New York City, August 2, 1983.

[45] Thomas Cobb Brody, Telephone Conversation during Martin Interview, August 2, 1983.

[46] Cobb, Exit Laughing, pp. 261-62.

[47] Cobb, Exit Laughing, p. 79.

[48] Irvin S. Cobb, "Wanted: A Fool-Proof War," The Glory of the Coming (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), p. 245.

[49] Cobb, "Wanted: A Fool-Proof War,: p. 249.

[50] Irvin S. Cobb, "When the Fighting Was Good," Back Home (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), pp. 179-82.

[51] Cobb, Exit Laughing, p. 330.

[52] Advertising campaign layout for "Judge Priest" film, Bobbs-Merrill Archive, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

[53] Irvin S. Cobb, "The Cowboy and the Lady--And Her Pa," Ladies and Gentlemen (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1924), pp. 255-58.

[54] Irvin S. Cobb, Speaking of Operations (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1915), pp. 11-12.

[55] Irvin S. Cobb, "A Close Shave," Ladies and Gentlemen (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1924), p. 259.

[56] Irvin S. Cobb, "Judge Priest Comes Back," Old Judge Priest (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1914), p. 107.

[57] Irvin S. Cobb, "The Cater-Cornered Sex," Sundry Accounts (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1922), p. 65.

[58] Cobb, "The Cater-Cornered Sex," p. 60.

[59] Irvin S. Cobb, "His Mother's Apron Strings," Snake Doctor (New York: Review of Reviews Corp., 1923), pp. 235-6.

[60] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 347.

[61] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 349.

[62] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 359.

[63] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 360.

[64] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 349.

[65] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 350.

[66] Judith D. Hoover, "Between Times: Nineteenth Century Values in the Twentieth Century," The Southern Quarterly XXIV (Spring, 1986): 50.

[67] "Irvin Cobb, Highest Paid Short Story Writer," Louisville Herald, July 1, 1925; "Irvin Cobb, Our Leading Literary Heavyweight," Current Opinion 74 (Feb., 1923): 231-232.

[68] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 362.

[69] Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm...," 363.

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